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SOME FUTURE ISSUES IN THE SEX PROBLEM.

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FOR any organized social movement which, in order to increase its ultimate effectiveness, expects to carry with it the impedimenta of conservative opinion and support, it may in general be wise not to cross bridges until they are reached. Like a modern army, some social movements lay siege to a whole battle front, and no unit can be forced ahead too far without weakening or breaking the line. But aeroplanes are constantly flying far over the terrain to be invaded, to test the range of guns, to watch the enemy's movements, to correlate the armies, to guide strategy. A strategist often has to assume the success of his present campaigns in calculating his objectives and the necessity of future moves.

To apply the metaphor to the task of social hygiene, we have a right and a duty to look ahead—though it may be a generation, or a century,—to the completion of the most active present drives in the sex problem, and to ask, what then? Are we through? Have we got what we want? Are we likely to get it? Would we rather have something else? If so, why? If not, why not? And what is to be done about it?

The classical economist was wont to simplify his economic problems and social prophecies by segregating and combining hypothetically, certain recognized factors, and deducing the results under assumed conditions. For purposes of analysis and for the isolation of tendencies this procedure has real usefulness. Let us, so far as possible, apply the method to the social situation here considered, first naming certain active factors, and then assuming them to be permanently effective, inquiring the result upon other more passive conditions.

The writer will endeavor to show that the net tendency

of many present forces is toward a loosening of orthodox sex morality based on fear of results, and that research is necessary to secure a basis in fact for the positive sanctions which will be necessary for any ultimately effective education in sex morals.

I.

The most conspicuous and successful efforts of the more conservative social hygiene agencies at present seem to be (1) for the control of venereal disease, and (2) for the suppression of commercialized vice and elimination of professional prostitution.

Thus far outside of the organized social hygiene movement, but almost as obvious and ultimately none the less important, are (3) the so-called "birth-control" movement, (4) the so-called "Mutterschutz" propaganda, (5) the alleged lessons of psychoanalysis, (6) the practical freedom of divorce, (7) the economic independence of women and (8) the endowment of motherhood.

(1) It is claimed that with the means already known it is possible practically to eliminate venereal disease. Let us assume that we have succeeded in doing so.

(2) It is claimed that it is entirely possible to reduce commercialized prostitution to a negligible minimum through law enforcement and reformatory work. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that this is a true and accomplished fact.

Assuming, at this point, that there has been no great change in other social factors, we must recognize that there is a great group of men to whom the supernatural sanctions for conduct and even the accepted code of morality are meaningless; and who, if they were "moral" before, were so purely from fear,—one might almost say cowardice—either of disease or of social stigma. *Ex hypothesi*, they are no longer afraid of disease. They can no longer find public prostitutes, *ex hypothesi*. For we have assumed the practical elimination of disease and of commercialized prostitution as factors in our equation.

The most effective remaining deterrents from extra-

marital intercourse would be pregnancy and public opinion. Neither the fear of giving birth to an unwanted, unsupported, and stigmatized child, nor the stigma of scorn and ostracism supposed to be visited upon those indulging in immoral relationships seems to have proved of universal efficiency in recent years. This is said to be especially true in Europe. As a result of the "social hygiene movement," therefore, we might, in the absence of other deterrents look forward to the bugbear of the segregationists, from de Mandeville to Lecky: namely, the frequent "ruining" of young girls by men, not, to be sure, in the crude form of rape, but through "education," *i.e.*, seduction or bribing. This would hold, even if the elimination of venereal diseases and public prostitution were the only changes under way.

But, as noted above, other movements are simultaneously afoot, busily undermining the inhibitions against freedom of intercourse on the part of the group of men above mentioned—and corresponding groups of women. Consider (3) birth control, and (4) the "Mutterschutz" propaganda involving the elimination of social stigma on "illegitimate" motherhood and childhood.

In a measure these two movements are mutually antagonistic. In another sense they dovetail. At least one sentimental argument for the removal of stigma on illegitimate mating is that the coming of the child "couldn't be helped," short of abortion, and that it is unfair to the child to stigmatize its parents or impair its status. Birth control eliminates this argument. At least one conventional doctrine of illegitimacy was that pregnancy is the logical punishment for immorality, and that immorality would be increased by the elimination of pregnancy through birth control. "Mutterschutz" declares all birth sacred. General knowledge of birth control would seem to obviate the necessity of this phase of the "Mutterschutz" campaign, and vice versa.

On the other hand, both birth control and "Mutterschutz" act together to reduce the motives for abstinence

on the part of persons not married to one another. Whether or not the "Mutterschutz" movement is entirely successful in abolishing the stigma of illegitimacy, knowledge of birth control seems inevitable. The two together will serve to reduce to a minimum any deterrent effect on account of what might be termed biological reasons. Birth control alone will eliminate the economic fear connected with the possibility of conception, and the newer attitude toward illegitimacy will, again *ex hypothesi*, eliminate the fear of conventional ostracism and legal discrimination.

As a mere matter of speculation, then, what have we left when the aforesaid movements, already under way, have attained their objectives? We have noted that there is admittedly a group, perhaps a mass, of people to whom religion and morals mean little. These folks are now, according to our supposition, further released from restraint due to fear of disease, "white slavery," pregnancy, or social conventions. It seems reasonable to suppose that, under these conditions (which are perhaps not so far different from the actual as some of us would like to imagine), there would be an increase of promiscuity or at least of "free relationships" and of private prostitution for cash or support.

Two more factors were mentioned which seem likely further to reduce the buttresses of the "accepted" standards of sex conduct. They are (5) the growing independence of women from any need of marriage on economic grounds, and (6) the spread of opinions based on the so-called "new psychology" of wishes or desires and their thwarting, release, and control.

(5) In so far as the emancipation of woman means the reduction of unwilling prostitution and the abandonment of a double standard of sex ethics based on the woman's ancient status as man's "property," it is pretty generally accepted as a boon. But "feminism" may unify the standard of morality by levelling "down" as well as up, by permitting economically free women who do not desire

or are not desired in marriage, to indulge sexually with or without motherhood. This is, indeed, admitted both by certain opponents and by certain supporters of the "woman's movement"—in other words, both by those who dread this freedom as a "lowering" and by those who look upon it as a gain, or who think it will not menace the existence of the best homes. Incidentally, birth control, "Mutterschutz," and state endowment of motherhood regardless of legal marriage, probably tend to increase the independence of women in respect to marriage.

(6) Sexual excess has always been condemned as injurious, though what constitutes excess is subject to difference of opinion. The theory that sex indulgence is a necessity for mere physical manhood or bodily health has, of course, long been exploded. But the same modern psychology which brands *physical* "sex necessity" as the mere rationalization of a repressed wish, is declaring that the *psychic* sex nature—the "life-urge," or "libido"—embodies instincts and wishes which, if suppressed in certain ways, may express themselves in abnormal ways injurious to the individual and society. The results of psychanalysis in many cases of abnormal psychology seem to point to sex repression as an evil. It is further claimed by some neurologists that prolonged continence may cause nervous impotence. It is probable that many will seize upon these new theories as a new excuse for freely indulging their repressed desires.

It is, indeed, claimed that the risks and evil results of "illicit" sex indulgence are greater than the occasional or relatively slight injury alleged to be due to prolonged continence. Even if no disease or exposure were to ensue, the sense of guilt and the psychic lesions caused by repression of the "double life" and by the necessity for lying and concealment would probably be worse, in most cases, than any nervous results of continence, except where there had been previous sexual excess and loss of shame. But the "suppressed complexes" due to the taboo on sex and to the sense of guilt are themselves dependent upon the existence

of a social stigma upon illicit relations. We have assumed this social stigma to be gradually disappearing because of the possibility of birth control, the "Mutterschutz" movement, and the freedom of women.

While the "new psychology" points out how recreation, art, religion, and social service may serve as "sublimation" of the sex impulses for both the married and the unmarried, the effects of these theories of modern psychology, be they true or false, are likely to be felt in moral standards long before society will be persuaded to provide the adequate recreation, aesthetic, spiritual and social outlets, or opportunity for early marriage for the masses.

To sum up thus far, we have assumed and considered, as the chief determining factors in future sex morality, the control of venereal diseases, the suppression of commercialized vice, the general acceptance of birth control, the abandonment of stigma on illegitimacy, the independence of women, and the "modern" psychology of sex. Their combined effect seems to be that of loosening and breaking down traditional standards, by the elimination of the fear of results.

Let us consider this situation further in relation to the other active factors which have been mentioned.

(7) The breaking down of the barriers to divorce, religious, legal and social, may be considered practically inevitable if not already in large part accomplished. Let us, therefore, suppose divorce free except for necessary public proceedings regarding property and children.

(8) The tendency toward and propaganda for the subsidy of parenthood is evident in the "mothers' pensions" movement and may increase with the demand for human conservation due to the war. The old Malthusian fear of overpopulation has largely disappeared with the spread of birth control and rising planes of living, and has given place rather to a fear, probably equally unjustified, of underpopulation. The latter fear may, however, lead to encouragement of childbearing until the pendulum shall swing again in a rhythmic readjustment to the costs and standards of living.

Free divorce and endowment of motherhood will, apparently, reduce fear of legal marriage. If, therefore, legal marriage be considered an indispensable element of the home, and *ipso facto* a justifiable goal of morality, it may be claimed that free divorce and "paid motherhood," so deplored by some moralists, may counteract the alleged "demoralizing" effects of social hygiene, birth control, "Mutterschutz," feminism, and psychoanalysis.

However, free divorce in and of itself might conceivably decrease the conventional prestige and sanctions of marriage as a legal institution; and the "Mutterschutz" movement includes the equal endowment of unmarried mothers. Non-support and desertion laws are more and more being brought to bear with practically equal weight upon married or unmarried fathers. Such laws may stimulate birth control but they probably do not greatly affect the marriage rate. The modern tendency is against the "forced marriage," as a tragic farce, adding evil to evil. If the desirability of traditional sex morality as a goal has been undermined, so has the fear of marriage as a threat to the sex delinquent. Apparently, then, free divorce and support laws may have comparatively little effect on future morality one way or the other.

If, however, the accepted code of moral prohibitions and inhibitions has no other basis in conduct than fear of results which are preventable by other means than abstinence, and no other basis in results than conditions which are otherwise avoidable, it seems to have no other justifications in the future we imagined, beside those of taste and religion, which are largely subjective except as they affect others through tradition and convention.

Cowardice is hardly a virtue. If there were no longer any ill results, physical, social, economic, or legal, from which a party to or possible child of irregular intercourse should be protected, it is questionable how "moral" so-called right conduct, due only to fear, would be. *A positive morality should be based on positive rewards.* What, under the assumed conditions, can the moralist offer?

II.

In short, the logical net result of the present set of tendencies, simplified for the sake of clearness in argument, seems to be the gradual abandonment of the traditional or Christian code of sex morality by a goodly fraction of the population. This will be due to the absence of fear of penalty from any supernatural source, and the removal of fear of disease, misery, disgrace or poverty.

Has any group, with the possible exception of some extremists, faced this issue squarely? More particularly, are conservative and cautious social hygiene agencies prepared to face frankly the possibilities of the results indicated, or even the consequences of their own success, with or without the other factors mentioned?

Three courses seem to be open: (1) To combat the prospect sketched above by attempting to give "moral" education at least enough force to offset the combined effect of the probable control of venereal diseases, reduction of commercialized vice, and acceptance of birth control; (2) to acquiesce in the popular verdict as inevitable or as *vox dei*; or (3) to guide and formulate the new state of affairs into a new code of "morals" which will not in our opinion be anti-social. What facts are there to influence our choice of policy?

(1) It will be claimed that the sex hygiene movement has throughout its history stressed morals and education. This is true. But let us analyze the statement. How much of this so-called moral education has been based on the supposed wish of God which is often only the projection of our own or our ancestors' wishes? How much of it has grown up simply to conform sex and marriage to the interests of some dominant class or to an inherited code of law and custom? How much has been based on the ethics of exposure to and transmission of disease? How much has been based on the risk and horrors of professional prostitution or "white slavery"? How much has been based on fear of pregnancy and the stigma of illegitimacy? And

how much "moral education" is there left after these factors are eliminated?

It may not be denied that under present conditions all these are valid moral arguments: because exposure, infection, social disgrace, all have moral aspects which may still legitimately be used to strengthen the campaign for sex hygiene. But the morality involved in these matters is not the same, and its issues should not be confused with the morality or immorality of extra-marital intercourse in and of itself. If the latter be stripped of all bolsters and buttresses based on the conditions we have assumed to be eliminated, we find, as apparently the only remaining moral sanctions of continence outside of marriage, (a) the pressure of habitual folkways or conventions, (b) the maintenance, in its present state, of the monogamic family, and (c) the alleged benefits of continence, in and of itself, upon the mind and body.

(a) The pressure of social conventions or "mores" may be said to be relatively weak, and certainly is variable according to time, place, and social class, under modern complex conditions. Moreover, public opinion is like a glacier. Though it budges too slowly for the reformer's individual efforts, it is irresistibly governed by the economic, social, and physical environment. We have already assumed that the conventional morals of birth control and illegitimacy are to change. It is reasonable to admit that, given the conditions named, any moral stigma on incontinence not based upon demonstrable effects on society or the individual would also melt away in time in the face of the new conditions, as it already has among certain groups.

(b) This mention of the effects of incontinence upon society and the individual leads to the second remaining sanction for extra-marital continence—namely the maintenance, in its present form or forms, of the monogamic family.

It behooves one to pause at the threshold of that holy of holies. The aesthetic and ethical ideals, the struggles

and sacrifices, and, apparently, race survival and that thing called Christian civilization, have been largely based upon some form of the monogamic home. Yet the same thing was once said of the Church; and sociological research tells us how rapid (in historical perspective) have been the changes in the spiritual and institutional character of ecclesiastical institutions.

The modern family is, after all, a very recent and multi-form institution, and it is changing under our very eyes. We do not see the unfolding of a bud or the growth of a seed, because our sense time-span is too short; nor do we often observe social changes until they are history.

We must admit, then, that the family, even the monogamic family, may change without necessarily destroying the home, and we may assume in that case that change may be to forms either better or less well adapted to organic welfare. The question now arises whether further change in the recognized type or code of marriage is desirable. Later we may ask if such changes can be controlled or influenced to any appreciable extent through conscious propaganda.

In asking whether change in or from the monogamic family is desirable, however, we cannot depend upon any criterion so subjective as the wishes (whether frank or expressed in theories) of individuals whose personal experience may bias their judgment. You and I perhaps prefer permanent monogamy, and our wishes may easily be projected into theories that monogamy is identified with and indispensable to human progress. It is "human nature" for folks to try to force their standards on others. Our personal tastes, however, furnish in this case no valid reason for so doing, for monogamy will, in all probability, always be possible for the many who spontaneously like it.

The data of historical sociology and ethnology should afford a more solid basis for judgment as to the social worth of a monogamic family form, as well as of extra-marital continence. cursory examination of this material reveals many plausible warrants for the assumption that

some form of monogamy has survival value on other than economic and crude protective grounds. Further research is desirable, however, to prove whether family happiness and home life, and especially the quality and care of children, can be secured in fullest measure only from that permanent exclusive monogamy and extra-marital continence which are the orthodox standard. But even into the conclusions of history and ethnology subjective elements almost inevitably enter, through the nature of the source material, if not through the investigator's own subconscious bias.

Whether a change in the family code is desirable, therefore, must eventually be determined through social research of a kind for which even the methodology is hardly developed—a case by case study of the sex experiences of all classes, correlated in a valid statistical way with some index of family and child welfare. Only in this way may be developed sufficiently objective social sanctions for present standards of monogamy.

When we hunt, however, for the elements of personal conduct which affect domestic harmony and hence the rearing of children, we at once enter the realm of social psychology. Is the primary function of sex mere physical reproduction, or communion for mutual joy and benefit? Can either sex have physical relations with more than one mate, simultaneously or successively, without tarnishing the nature of the marriage relation actual or potential? Such questions can be answered only by establishing such facts as the essential psychological nature of romantic love, of attraction, of sexual jealousy, and of the sense of guilt or "sin," all of them age-long mysteries. Are they created by social imitation or are they instinctive reactions? If jealousy be an instinct, can it be controlled or suppressed entirely by social pressure? If so, will it create troublesome "suppressed complexes"? How far is jealousy merely fear of disease, of pregnancy, and of stigma, all of which fears are, as we have seen, possibly to disappear?

Similar questions arise regarding filial relations as

affected by the morals of marriage; though were it found that families composed of children from mixed or doubtful parentage are (independent of social stigma) likely to be unsuccessful, the universal knowledge of birth-control, presupposed in our argument, would largely take care of any such difficulty. If it were shown that the number of folks spontaneously desiring children were sufficient to maintain social welfare, it is quite conceivable that society might sanction any form of marriage or free relationship in which birth control was successfully practiced, but demand monogamy, permanent or for a term of years, for any unions resulting in children.

There would remain, however, questions of the effect of polygamy, successive or simultaneous, upon the subconscious, upon the aesthetic nature, upon emotional harmony, mental integrity and efficiency—all of these being questions of social psychology, subject only to inductive research for their final answer.

(c) The last named questions, however, are closely related to the question of the individual effects of extra-marital continence. This question should be settled for the present purposes on grounds of physical and mental hygiene in their broadest sense, but independent of disease and independent of the mental effects of social stigma and the sense of guilt; though both of these, under present conditions, are still doubtless valid arguments against incontinence.¹

In the analysis of cases involving any of the above problems, it may be difficult to segregate the social from the purely physio-psychological elements. But the challenge to psychologists is worth their acceptance, for upon the results of such research depend in large part the soundness of the present program of sex morality, its ultimate effects, and its relation to and influence upon the morality of the future.

¹ The psychic and physical results of masturbation should similarly be studied, if possible, independently of the mental effects of shame, which is largely conditioned by moral preconceptions.

If those results negative our present ideals or wishes, whether we like it or not, we must face the facts frankly. Aesthetics will then be the only kind of education for sex morality which is not bolstered up artificially (and, therefore, probably temporarily) by the present existence of disease, theology, prostitution, poverty, ignorance and prejudice. And who knows but what psychologists may claim that even aesthetics are merely a matter of personal taste, socially changeable with time and environment?

If, therefore, we are to try the first alternative course of strengthening "moral" education to the point of offsetting the removal of all motives of fear from "immoral relationships," we must base that moral education on facts independent of disease and tradition, facts which are available so far only in the haziest form. And this practically implies changes in the "morals" to be taught, and the impossibility of our first alternative course, of combating the inevitable. Only those ethical teachings which are based on scientific facts of body and soul can hope to influence beneficially the actual moral standards and behavior of coming generations.

(2) The materialist or the anarchist might declare all this to-do useless. He or she may prefer to take things as they come, to hasten the result as desirable or to deny that the outcome may be influenced either for "good" or for "evil." To this, the writer can only oppose the active interests, or the human nature, of another group whose scale of values and lines of thought based thereon are increasingly dominant over *laissez faire*, even as the occident dominates the orient. In other words, the writer appeals frankly to his readers' prejudices in favor of the third possible course. We gain little and may lose much by letting our own wishes for society drift, or be anaesthetized, while others are pushing and steering independently (whether consciously or unconsciously) amid the new currents toward dimly perceived goals.

(3) If research should definitely foreshadow the partial or complete abandonment of old sanctions of sex conduct,

it will certainly be wiser to foresee, formulate, interpret, and thereby recognize and absorb and socialize the new state of affairs, than to play the ostrich, to acquiesce supinely, or to stand across the path of the inevitable changes. To attempt unintelligently to thwart such changes is apt to make them rebellious, covert, and dangerous, both in individuals and in society. If, on the other hand, the efforts of social and physical psychologists produce convincing evidence of the independent social and individual value of continence and of some form of monogamy, then there is every reason for full speed ahead in moral education upon this solid ground of self-supporting facts, to counterpoise the other factors actively at work, and to prevent their acting anti-socially upon the existing sex standards.

Until the many issues raised above can be faced and searched out, social hygiene agencies, however conservative and well-supported, will necessarily be dodging logical issues of psychology and public education which, like the issues of legal control of prostitution, medical prophylaxis of venereal disease, birth control, and the economics of marriage, have in the past been dodged and are now accepted or are imminent. In so doing, these agencies may diminish their opportunity of social leadership in the sex and home life of the future.

The extent and rapidity with which public opinion on such issues can actually be changed by convincing knowledge of the facts is witnessed by the epoch-making work of Mr. Flexner for the Bureau of Social Hygiene in the field of law-enforcement and by the effect of the war on the public's attitude toward prevention of venereal infections by "early treatment." But until we learn through inductive study to what extent we still have (or ever had) extra-marital continence, monogamy and a stigma on illegitimate relations or children; and to what extent we already have birth control, free unions, and free divorce or separations, we cannot even approach a satisfactory

answer to some of the fundamental future issues, let alone launch an adequate forward-looking propaganda.

"A long look ahead, and hardly practical" is the possible verdict of the reader upon the speculations of this article. But in times such as the present, all things are in the melting pot, in flux so mingled as to be obscured. Many incredible reconstructive developments have already startled us, and it behooves no one to prophesy how short or long a time may produce apparently revolutionary changes in that "human nature" so frequently alleged to be immutable.

The strategy of social hygiene calls for "observers" and an "intelligence corps" as well as for a general staff.

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